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THE MANOR OF PEACE

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WARE, MASSACHUSETTS

Reverend Grindall Rawson

And His Ministry

BY

ALFRED BAYLIES PAGE

Boston, Mass.

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THE MANOR OF PEACE

A NEW ENGLAND PARISH OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

"The Manor of Peace" was the tranquil and hopeful name given in the early days to the parish embraced in the ten thousand acres of "Equivalent lands" in the settlement now known as the town of Ware. This tract of land came into the hands of "John Read, of Boston, Esq." by purchase, and comprised a part of the "Equivalent" lands given by Massachusetts to Connecticut in exchange for certain grants which proved to be within the bounds of the latter Colony.

As early as 1748 (September 19), the number of settlers in this new frontier hamlet was large enough to lead Mr. Read to show his interest by giving a deed of certain lands "for the founding and Indowment of a Parish Church on the Ten Thousand acres of Equivalent lands, lying on the East side of Swift River, upon the Road from Brookfield to Hadley, and now called the mannor of Peace." This gift was to be held in trust "for the use of the first minister of God's Holy word and Sacraments" and his successors, "in pure and perpetual Almes," and "for the founding and continuance of a Parish Church and Christian Burying place," and "for a Glebe" for the benefit of the minister.

A year and a half later the choice of their minister fell upon Mr. Grindall Rawson, a graduate of Harvard College in the Class of 1741, and a man of about thirty years of age, although the ministers of that time commonly entered upon their work much earlier in life. He accepted the call in a letter dated "Peace, Feb. 11, 1750" [1751], addressing his friends in these rather pompous phrases:

> My Brethren — Since you were so [entirely] unanimous in your invitation of me to settle with you, . . . [and] notwithstanding the great discouragements in regard to my outward subsistence at present, and the many satisfactions of life of which I foresee I must deny myself, more I believe than you are sensible of, . . . I have concluded to comply with your request, . . .
>
> . . . And that you may behave yourselves, as becomes knowing, wise, and discreet Christians, nothing wavering or unsteady, shall ever be my prayer for you.

Accustomed to a life of ease and scholarly pursuits, it is not hard to see that a step from this condition into the surroundings of a frontier parish was not attractive to the young gentleman. And there is about him an air of conscious superiority, and a condescending determination to make the best of a disagreeable bargain.

His ordination took place on May 8, 1751, and the services at the time are printed in one of the rare and quaint square pamphlets of that period, with this title:

The faithful Minister's Trials, Qualifications, Work, and Reward described: Or, A distinguishing Reward in Heaven, One Grand Motive Christ propounds to his Ministers, to animate them to constant Fidelity in their Work, amidst all Trials and Difficulties.

A SERMON

Preach'd at the Ma'nor of Peace,

in the County of *Hampshire*,

On *May* the 9th, 1751.

At the

ORDINATION

Of the Reverend

Mr. *GRINDALL RAWSON.*

By **Thomas Skinner,** A.M.

Pastor of the Second Church in COLCHESTER.

Published at the Desire, and Expence of the Heirs of the late Honourable JOHN READ *Esq*; and Others.

N. B. That several Passages Omitted in the Delivery, are now Inserted.

[12 lines from the Scriptures.]

N. LONDON, Printed and Sold by T. GREEN, MDCCLI.

Square 12mo. pp. (2 l.). 49. (1). And a slip of *Errata* of 10 lines pasted in.

There is a copy of this pamphlet in the library of the Massachusetts Historical Society and of the New York Historical Society.

As in the early days the preachers quoted extensively from the Scriptures for illustration in their discourses, so in this instance, for the purpose of bringing our readers into a closer sympathy with the feelings of the people in spiritual matters at that time, rather copious extracts from this Ordination Sermon will be given.

The preacher, Rev. Thomas Skinner, of Colchester, Connecticut, introduces himself in these words:

'Tis not any Fondness for appearing on this Solemn and Publick Occasion that has now brought me into the Sacred *Desk*; but the repeated Requests and Importunity of the Pastor Elect, who will therefore (I presume) suffer me (who have had some Experience of the Trials Ministers are Incident unto) to mind Him of some of the Difficulties, He must Expect to meet with in the Work, which (God willing) He is now Solemnly to be introduced into, and from what Quarters these will arise . . .

Had this Part of the Public Exercises of this Day devolved upon some Abler Hand, and more Experienc'd Pastor, we might justly [have] Expected to have been much more agreeably Entertained now, than by one of the Least and most Unworthy of the Ministerial Order; but since I have been prevailed upon to Undertake it, I trust my Reverend Fathers and Brethren in the Ministry present, will afford me their Candour and Patience, while I humbly Attempt to suggest some Thoughts and Meditations from the Words Read, suitable to this Solemnity.

As to the embarrassments and difficulties in the field of ministerial work, the preacher continues, that "Of all Employments, therefore, in this State [or condition of society]

there is none attended with Cares, Tears, Difficulties and Temptations, that exceed, or equal, those that accompany the Work of a Gospel Minister," and this idea is, of course, further elaborated.

Struggling against the " Corruption of their own Hearts," the ministers are also harassed by " The Stupidity, Security, and Ignorance of some, likewise the Wilfulness and Perve[r]seness of others, and the Wickedness and Negligence of most, in their Turns." And the classification of the future parishioners, as follows, is interesting and suggestive, even now:

> The *Worldly*, and *Covetous* Man, the *Proud* and *Conceited* Man, the *Peevish*, and *Quarrelsome* Man, the *Erroneous*, and *Ungovernable* Man, the *Dishonest*, and *Unrighteous* Man, the *Backsliding*, and *Apostatizing* Professor, the *Lukewarm*, and *Formalist*, the Self-*Righteous*, and *Superstitious Bigot*, often conspire to Oppose, and load them with Difficulties and Troubles, and sometimes, even Overwhelm and Deluge them [*i. e.* the ministers], as in an *Ocean* of *Sorrows*.
>
> And may I not add, here, That the *Mad Enthusiast*, the Man of great *Heat*, and *Conceit*, and little *Light*; under the *Influence* of *Prejudice, Blind Zeal, Rigid* and *Dividing Principles*, Occasions them much *Trouble*, and many grievous *Perplexities*.

After this graphic characterization, or arraignment if you like, of the young man's future congregation, it is not surprising to learn that, in the opinion of the preacher and under prevailing conditions, " *Faith, Patience, Watchful-*

ness and *Fortitude* are needful in Gospel Ministers, as well as *Knowledge* and *Prudence*." And the preacher offers to us, in contrast with his estimate of the parishioners, his view of the preachers in general, as follows:

There is no People on Earth, perhaps, Notwithstanding the Endeavours of some to blacken them, and fill the minds of People with evil Surmises about them, favoured with a more Laborious, Faithful and Godly Ministry than the People of New-England.

Even was this true at a time when the brilliancy of the ministerial galaxy had been lately dimmed by the loss of several shining lights, of whom this list is given:

Of late, the Aged, Venerable, truly Pious and Learned Mr. *Walter* of *Roxbury*, Mr. *Eells*, of *Scituate*; Mr. *Burnham* of *Kensington*; Mr. *Brown* of *Brooklin*, and Mr. *Arthur* of *Brunswick*.

Since the Delivery of this Discourse the Venerable and Aged Mr. *Whitman* of *Farmington*; the Upright & Learned Mr. *Williams* of *Waltham*. Also Mr. *Meriam*, & Mr. *Griswold*, both Candidates of the *Ministry*, & in the very Bloom of Life.

In the parting admonition to the people they are addressed and besought in this manner: "O then don't Despise Him, don't needlessly Grieve Him, either by your Contentions among your selves, or, with *Him*, or by being Unkind to Him; Don't Reproach him, or Fault him for Plain and Close Dealing in the Pulpit, or out of it; and for being Severe against Sin, and Laying before you the Danger of

Wallowing in beloved Lusts, and the Danger of Neglecting to Hear Christ's Calls, to Embrace the Gospel Offer, and Leading *Wicked* and *Unholy Lives*."

To the generous benefactors of the parish for their timely gifts, the preacher pays his tribute by remarking to them that: "Had you been their natural Parents, and they the Children of your own Bowels, Methinks, you could not have Contributed much more Bountifully to their Assistance; in the great Work before them, of Settling a Minister, and Erecting an House for the Worship of God; which must have been very heavy in their low and infant State, on them, If not Insupportable, without your Help — And we hope you will still shew Kindness to this People, and to *him* who is now to be Introduced into the Pastoral Office among *them*."

These extracts and notes disclose to the reader a fair and accurate view of the religious affairs of that time, which were at a low ebb. Moreover we catch glimpses of the state of mind of the Preacher behind the pulpit and the People in front of it.

In the particular case under consideration, however, these invocations and appeals for Divine help and for faithfulness on the part of the people did not immediately bring forth the desired results. In spite of all the hope and trust implied in the name given to the settlement, the happy anticipations were not realized. The establishment of The Manor

of Peace was still a dream of the future. Soon the parochial relations became strained, and disaffection arose, probably on both sides, and our newly settled minister "gladly accept[ed] the opportunity of releasing" himself from the settlement, where the people were strangers to him and the conditions those to which he had been unused.

Fortunately for the purpose of our study, there exists in print the sermon delivered at Mr. Rawson's installation a few years later (1755) over another church. Certain allusions and references therein give further light for our story of a New England Parish of 1750. Considering all the circumstances and the relations of our friend with his former parish, which we have seen were not altogether happy and peaceful, the words of the preacher at his installation over a new field become peculiarly significant and earnest in an exceptional way. On this occasion the venerable and reverend Ebenezer Gay, of Hingham, addresses the congregation at Yarmouth in these words:

The Relation of *Pastor* and *People* is sacred; the Duties respectively incumbent on them are great and weighty, the Discharge of which requires a firm and lasting Attachment to each other. It is usual, on such Occasions as this, for the Monitor unto both, to enlarge principally upon the Minister's strict Engagements to the People, over whom he is ordain'd, or install'd; and thence infer their reciprocal Obligations to Him. My *reverend and* honoured Hearers will allow me, at

this Time, to invert the Order, and begin my Discourse with this divine Admonition to the People.

After appealing to the congregation "to forsake not the Levite, their Minister" and admonishing the people not to "join with those who say to them, 'Come, and let us devise Devices against him, and let us smite him with the Tongue, and not give heed to any of his Words,'" the preacher continues:

People should further take heed, that they forsake not the Minister, under whom they are orderly placed, for another, as truly authorised, and equally, or even better able, to *teach*. It is the Ordinance of God, that every Pastor should have his own Flock to attend, and take heed unto: And every Flock should adhere to it's own faithful Pastor. People should take heed, that they do not out of Levity and Inconstancy of Mind, or the Itching of their Ears after Novelties [! !], or the Prevalence of some foolish Humour: or sinful Corruption, heap to themselves Teachers, and go after Strangers.

These remarks and those addressed especially to the new minister are frank and honest expressions of the feeling in matters of religion at the time. Particular significance attaches to the reference to the former pastorate which is given in these lines:

You (Dear Brother), cannot, and others (I hope) will not, misconstrue the present Discourse, as impeaching your Conduct in the Separation which hath happen'd betwixt you and the People, over which you was ordain'd. The Reasons and Grounds of it were examin'd by proper Judges, who acquitted

you of all Blame in that Matter. And it would be very invidious in any to say unto you, as *Eliab* did to *David,* who, by his Father's Order, brought a fresh supply of Provision for his Brethren at the Camp of *Israel*; Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few Sheep in the Wilderness? As your Dismission from the Care of a little Flock was regular, so your Call to take the Over-sight of this is (we trust) clear. And it is now incumbent on you, to take heed unto your self, that you forsake not this people, by any straying Steps in the Course of your Ministry: And that you give them no Offence in any Thing, or occasion to forsake you. The Work of the Ministry was, at your Seperation to it, clearly and fully set before you, in a Sermon which you have in your Hand. [This was the Rev. Mr. Skinner's Sermon which has been referred to in the early part of this article.]

In his new pastorate, as minister of the Church in Yarmouth, Massachusetts, for a few years our friend found easier circumstances and his lines fell in pleasanter places. This was true in many ways, for at that time the spiritual conditions prevailing in Barnstable County were exceptionally happy and flourishing. A remarkable group of faithful and honoured ministers were settled over the Cape towns, and religious affairs were at flood tide. Here, too, Mr. Rawson became a member of an aristocratic family by his marriage to Desire, daughter of Colonel Joseph Thacher. His last years were spent in quietude and retirement, and his transmigration to the eternal Manor of Peace closed a life exceeding the period allotted by the Psalmist.

As a matter of record it may be well to state here that *our* Grindall Rawson, of Ware and Yarmouth, was born at Dorchester on 30 July, 1721, the son of Peletiah and Hannah (Hall) Rawson and great-grandson of the noted Colonial Secretary, Edward Rawson; and in "Thomas's Massachusetts Spy" (Worcester), December 17, 1794, appears the following brief notice of his death: "At Sutton, Nov. 18th, the Rev. Grindall Rawson, of Dover, formerly minister of Yarmouth, aged 73." This item contains, so far as I have been able to discover, the only record of the death of the Harvard College graduate of 1741, who had perhaps been living just previously in Dover, New Hampshire, with the family of his son Jonathan.

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